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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the influence of class size and school personnel on the development and implementation of the curriculum of 10 inner city schools in Montreal, Quebec. Information is based on interview data, personnel records, and responses to a questionnaire. Results indicate that while teacher-pupil ratios in inner city schools are slightly less than in non-inner city schools, actual class size is not significantly less. Principals and teachers in inner city schools are found to have less teaching experience and greater staff turnover than those in middle class schools. Results are discussed with reference to the educational implications of teacher experience, satisfaction, and stability on the implementation of the curriculum. A selectively screened and well prepared staff is suggested to be an essential component for curriculum development. An identification of pupils' needs and the establishment of educational priorities to adapt the curriculum to reflect these priorities is stressed, along with improvement in teacher education programs and inservice training for teachers and administrators in inner city schools. (Author/AM)

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SEVERAL CURRICULLUM VARIABLES IN INNER CITY EDUCATION[1]

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SEVERAL CURRICULUM VARIABLES IN INNER CITY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated several variables influencing the development and implementation of the curriculum of ten inner city schools in Montreal. Data obtained through a questionnaire, personal interviews and personnel records revealed that while teacher-pupil ratios in inner city schools are slightly less than in non-inner city schools, actual class size is not significantly less. In addition, principals and teachers in inner city school were found to have less teaching experience and greater staff turnover than those in upper middle class schools. The results are discussed with reference to the educational implications of teacher experience, satisfaction and stability upon the implementation of the curriculum.

Several Curriculum Variables In Inner City Education

There exists many components within the educational environment that affect the way curriculum is presented to, and received by the pupils. The character of the classrooms and the school play an important part in determining whether or not pupils are enjoying a satisfactory educational experience. In turn, the character of the classroom and school depends upon the leadership of the principal and teachers, as well as the school's physical resources, its support personnel and its place in the community. Although none of these dimensions in isolation has proven to exert a great influence upon academic achievement (Stephens, 1968) together they form a significant part of the child's educational environment. To those who consider the context of the curriculum as important as the content, class and school conditions will result in significant differences.

For inner city education, it is essential that the term 'curriculum' be extended to include understandings, processes, concepts, attitudes, norms, and values. The inner city child needs help in developing not only basic learning skills and a realization of talents he may possess, but also essential personal qualities, including responsibility and self-discipline. Thus a good curriculum will incorporate the essential elements of an appropriate general education, remediation in areas as required, and exploration into the dynamics of human interaction. The curriculum must facilitate the reversal of a sense of futility, help overcome feelings of a deprecatory self-image, implant hope where there is hopelessness, produce positive rewarding experiences, provide worthy models for children

experience, stability and job demands of a school staff will undoubtedly effect both the pupils and the school. Securing a highly qualified, well trained, stable teaching staff is one of the critical problems facing inner city schools. The recruitment, training, and retention of competent teachers and administrators are vital factors in the process. Inner city schools have tended to be constantly harassed by high incidences of teacher turnover and absenteeism (Goldberg, 1967). The resulting consequences severely affect the continuity of the existing curriculum as it is presented to its pupils.

METHOD

Schools

Information and data were obtained from ten english-speaking elementary schools within the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal (PSBGM). All schools had been delineated as inner city schools and varied in the size and composition of their population. Five of the schools were primarily composed of immigrant children (Greek, Chineese, and Portugese) while the remaining five schools consisted of children from low socio-economic areas.

Data

Information was obtained through interviews, personnel records and responses to a questionnaire. A questionnaire was distributed to all classroom teachers in each of the inner city schools. Teachers were requested to complete the questionnaire which dealt with biographical data, aspects of the curriculum, support services and instructional methods.

One hundred and nine (47%) completed questionnaires were received from the inner city schools. Interviews regarding curriculum matters were conducted with principals, assistant principals, curriculum consultants, coordinators of programs, and School Board personnel responsible for policy decisions in inner city schools.

RESULTS

Class size

Actual classroom ratios were computed from the PSBGM staff book and compared to the official school ratios as reported by the principal of each school. Official ratios are computed by including all teaching personnel in each school. These ratios appear in Table 1. A t test revealed a significant difference

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Insert Table 1 about here

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between actual classroom ratios and official ratios ($t = 5.28$, $df = 18$, $p < .001$).

Several elementary schools in high socio-economic areas in Montreal were selected and matched according to total school enrollment. The mean number of pupils in each classroom was found to be 30.7 as compared with 26.4 for the inner city schools.

School Personnel

Principals

Since principals' assignments are partially regulated by the

size of the school population, each Inner City School (excluding School C which was not matched as it has a significantly higher population than any other school, and school D as it has become a satellite of another school this year) was matched with another school with approximately the same number of pupils. Based on principals' assignments for the school year 1974-1975, the following differences in the amount and type of principals' experience can be seen in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

As a group, inner city schools tend to have principals with less experience than the matched schools. In addition, three of the inner city schools have principals with no previous experience as such, even though they have had administrative experience as vice-principals. While these results were not found to be statistically significant ($t = .671$, $df = 14$ $p < .51$), the educational implications for curriculum leadership are apparent. Moreover, compared with matched schools, the principals of inner city schools generally have a greater proportion of their teaching experience in secondary school rather than in the elementary school. It is equally important to note that five of the ten inner city schools have experienced a change in administration while no changes have occured in the eight matched schools.

Interviews with principals revealed that while allocating their time differently, many acknowledged a large proportion of their time was spent on non-academic concerns. Dealing with the problems of individual children consumed a large proportion of their time. This

particular aspect of their job was so demanding that several principals felt that a crisis teacher or counsellor - someone especially trained to work with individual children would allow the principal sufficient time to take more leadership in school - wide concerns. Others felt that an administrative assistant or more secretarial help would relieve them of the managerial tasks which must be fulfilled but which should not take priority over teachers' and children's needs. Two principals reported spending a significant proportion of their time in the classroom while two others were determined to spend more time in the classroom.

Teachers

Teachers from Kindergarten to grade six in the inner city schools were compared with teachers from six schools in upper middle class communities to determine if any difference in teacher experience exists. The average teacher experience in inner city schools range from 2.9 - 9.1 years (Table 3), compared to middle-class school averages ranging

Insert Table 3 about here

from 7.7 to 17.3 years (Table 4). This difference was found to be

Insert Table 4 about here

statistically significant ($t = 3.75$, $df = 14$, $p < .01$).

The number of probationary teachers (teachers in their first and second year of teaching) is significantly greater ($\chi^2 = 3.93$ df = 1, $p < .05$) in inner city schools than in upper middle class schools. Table 5 reveals that 41 of 153 (26.8 per cent) teachers

Insert Table 5 about here

sampled in inner city schools, are on probation compared to 9 of the 77 teachers (11.8 per cent) sampled in upper middle class schools (see Table 6). Moreover, a sample of five additional schools within

Insert Table 6 about here

the inner city district for the academic year 1974-1975 revealed a higher percentage of probationary teachers (34.5 per cent) than in inner city schools during the 1973-1974 academic year.

Thirty three percent of the teachers questioned planned not to return to their present school within the inner city. While this figure is greater than the actual teacher turnover (some were refused transfers), this would have resulted in four of the ten inner city schools experiencing a 50 per cent change in teaching staff. This high rate is extremely acute in maintaining continuity of program in one track schools. Three of the four schools with a probable 50 percent teacher turnover are one-track schools. In addition, teacher transfers across districts revealed a subtantially greater percentage of teachers transferring out of the inner city into middle class schools than teachers transferring into inner city schools.

DISCUSSION

The educational arguments in favour of smaller class size are very convincing. A reduced student teacher ratio should result in more attention to individuals, more flexible teaching approaches, more small group discussions, greater individualization of instruction and a better understanding of the children. What is perhaps more important is that teachers simply prefer to work with small classes. Teachers perceive smaller classes as making their daily tasks easier (Clarizio, Craig and Mehren, 1974). In the present study while official student-teacher ratios in inner city schools were lower than those in other schools, the actual number of pupils in each classroom was significantly higher than the reported official ratio. A review of the literature indicated that significant differences in pupil achievement occur when classrooms do not exceed 25 pupils (Templeton, 1972). With regard to those schools studied, only two had such a favourable classroom ratio. While the ratios are somewhat lower than those which were observed in middle classschools this finding contradicts the popular belief held by school board officials that inner-city schools have educationally desirable classroom ratios.

The role of the principal in inner city elementary schools is exceedingly difficult. Children in inner city schools tend to make greater academic and non-academic demands on teachers, who in turn require more administrative support. In addition, principals are often unable to rely upon parental interest and support of the school's goals. Principals in inner city elementary schools tend to have less experience as administrative leaders, particularly with

respect to developing elementary school curriculum. In some instances the principal's only previous teaching experience were in secondary schools and thus they have had difficulty implementing curriculum leadership. The principals leaderships role is further compounded by the finding that teachers in inner city schools have considerably less experience, as reflected by years of service, than those of middle class schools. The need for administrative leadership in helping teachers understand and implement various curricular ideas is likely greater for inner city schools.

The self-report data provided by the administrators and teathers sampled suggests that they perceive their positions as being more demanding than would be the case in non-inner city schools. Inner city schools are often termed the "difficult" schools (Kornberg, 1963). Teachers in inner city schools report that they spend a great deal of time in non-teaching activities. A predominant concern is for classroom organization and discipline. Many of these teachers appeared displeased with several aspects of their job. For instance, among other grievances they list the following: recent declassification, student behaviour, disagreement with school administration, number of pupils in class, lack of materials, gaps in curriculum and lack of School Board leadership in helping improve education in inner city schools. Other teachers, fewer in number, were enthusiastic about the challenges and rewards of their job and reported testing a variety of ideas to improve the curriculum, the children's interest, their own instructional skills, and/or the life of the school.

Staff morale often appears to be a serious problem in inner city schools. What is important is that ways of increasing morale

be identified and implemented in these schools. The combination of less teaching experience, lack of willingness to remain in the present assignment and poor teacher morale has various consequences upon implementation of the curriculum. Teachers lacking in experience, morale and understanding of pupil attitudes and behaviours are likely to be more dependent upon administrative support and advice, and available consultant support than teachers who are more familiar with the community and curriculum. Furthermore, it is also likely that these teachers share insecurities which prevent them from being committed to innovation, course content improvement and curriculum development. When the survival demands of a job are perceived to be highly demanding, little surplus energy is likely to be available for professional improvement activities.

An essential component for curriculum development is a selectively screened and well prepared staff. Stability and experience for both administrative and teaching staff in inner city schools are desirable factors in the implementation of instruction. It is desirable that teachers be adept at strategies for developing certain student skills, attitudes and behaviours. In addition, they should possess the professional ability to select the appropriate content which ensures a 'proper match' between materials and activities and the child's developmental level.

While the particular teaching strategies and methods that are successful with inner city children are often not strikingly different from those used in other schools, their applications may differ. A necessary prerequisite for developing and applying various teaching

strategies for upgrading scholastic attainment is the analysis of the learner's needs. It is this ability, in conjunction with an understanding of the child's environment, and the dissonances between his self-expectations and school tasks that contribute to effective instruction. The importance of 'meeting children's needs' and of 'starting with children where they are' has been emphasized in the literature on inner city teaching (eg. Ausubel, 1964). It is worthy of note that is several of the schools investigated, the staffs were beginning to work together to identify the pupils' needs, to establish educational priorities and to adapt the curriculum to reflect these priorities. It appears that the effectiveness of the curriculum is highly dependent upon the personnel involved.

It is imperative that we continually seek ways to improve teacher education programs and in-service training for teachers and administrators in inner city schools. Similarly, it is essential to strive for small class size, an experienced and stable staff, and methods to improve teacher morale. The successful selection of a highly competent and satisfied staff will undoubtedly have a great effect upon the implementation of the curriculum.

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Table 1

STUDENT-TEACHER RATIOS IN INNER CITY SCHOOLS

School	Average Classroom Ratio	Official Ratio
A	27.8 :1	22.0 :1
B	27.7 :1	21.5 :1
C	28.1 :1	23.5 :1
D	26.0 :1	21.5 :0
E	29.3 :1	21.0 :1
F	26.6 :1	22.3 :1
G	22.7 :1	16.5 :1
H	21.6 :1	16.4 :1
I	26.1 :1	22.0 :1
J	27.7 :1	20.0 :1
Mean	26.4 :1	20.7 :1

Table 2

EXPERIENCE OF PRINCIPALS

Inner City School	No. of Pupils	Experience as Princ.	Experience as V-P	Matched School	No. of Pupils	Experience as Princ.	Experience as V-P.
J	218	4		1	229	2	
H	317	0	2	2	331	3	
I	334	3		3	333	3	
B	351	0	3	4	340	6	
E	425	0	4	5	406	15	3
G	453	3		6	446	3	1
F	756	15		7	781	11	
A	821	5		8	836	5	
Total		30	9			48	4

Table 3

AVERAGE TEACHER EXPERIENCE IN INNER CITY SCHOOLS

School	No. of Teachers	Average Years of Experience
A	28	2.9
B	9	5.3
C	34	6.8
D	7	6.3
E	11	8.3
F	25	4.5
G	17	5.5
H	12	9.1
I	4	5.3
J	6	4.8
Total	153	$\bar{x} = 6.3$

Table 4

AVERAGE TEACHER EXPERIENCE IN SAMPLED UPPER-MIDDLE-CLASS SCHOOLS

School	No. of Teachers	Average Years of Experience
1	12	9.3
2	13	10.1
3	10	17.3
4	8	8.3
5	13	7.7
6	20	12.8
Total	70	$\bar{x}$ = 11.0

Table 5

PROBATIONARY TEACHERS: INNER CITY SCHOOLS

School	Teachers Sampled	Number of Probation
A	28	1
B	9	2
C	34	8
D	7	2
E	11	2
F	25	11
G	17	4
H	12	2
I	4	1
J	6	1
Total	153	41

Table 6

PROBATIONARY TEACHERS: UPPER-MIDDLE CLASS SCHOOLS

School	Teachers Sampled	Number of Probation
1	12	5
2	12	2
3	10	0
4	8	0
5	13	1
6	22	1
Total	77	9